



Coping When a Long-term Relationship Ends

When any significant relationship in our life ends or changes, it's common to feel down or struggle with the absence of someone so important to us. After all, you're losing someone you'd come to rely on and share day to day details of your life. Whether it's a spouse, a romantic relationship or a friendship, there seems to be a hole in our lives where he or she once stood. Feeling sad or down is natural, and you're right – to be expected - even if you're the one who decided to change or end the relationship as it stood.

When this pain leads to questions about life's meaning, it's often a signal that a larger review of how you're operating needs to occur. When we struggle with a breakup, we're typically drawn to focus on the other person or the situation as the culprit. The reality is that in most cases, (excluding extreme circumstances of verbal/physical abuse or addiction) the pain is asking us to examine ourselves more closely so we can discover the internal source of it.

Questions to consider could include: 1) "What beliefs do I have that kept me in this relationship longer than was good for me/us?" 2) "What could I have done differently or better?" Sometimes we've made incorrect assumptions about a relationship, based on old experiences or patterns of relating. Sometimes we've behaved in negative ways we never realized. There are many possibilities for what we might learn about ourselves.

Examining your part of the relationship, which is the only part you have control over, can foster a sense of empowerment, learning and meaning in your life. For some, it can be tempting to get involved in another relationship quickly. We caution against this for at least six months after a breakup, as it takes time to digest what's happened in the previous relationship and develop your equilibrium again. By giving yourself this time and space, you can grieve what's been lost and develop a sense of what you want to be different in the future.

So, you aren't blowing things out of proportion. You're struggling with a big change in your life. We'd advise you to be gentle with yourself, eat right, exercise, get enough sleep, and take time to reflect on and assess how you're doing. Journaling is often helpful, as it allows for more careful examination of thoughts and feelings. Spend time doing what you love, and talk with good friends or family – people that remind you of your value. If you find you're still struggling, professional counseling could help guide you.

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